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A
R E V I E W
OF THE
Constitution of Great Britain:
BEING THE
SUBSTANCE OF A SPEECH
DELIVERED
IN A NUMEROUS ASSEMBLY
ON THE FOLLOWING
QUESTION:

“ Is the Petition of Mr. Horne Tooke a Libel on the House
“ of Commons, or a just Statement of public Grievances
“ arising from an unfair Representation of the People ? ”

BY A FRIEND TO THE PEOPLE.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR J. RIDGWAY, NO. 1, YORK-STREET,
ST. JAMES'S-SQUARE.

1791.

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Saturday Club

Boston, Dec. 5, 1904

IS

The Petition of Mr. Horne Tooke

A LIBEL ON

THE HOUSE OF COMMONS?

&c. &c. &c.

GENTLEMEN!

OF Socrates, a great and good character of antiquity, it was reported to his praise, that he conducted the philosophy of the Greeks, from the contemplation of the celestial phenomena, to the duties of civil life, and the more important objects of moral action and political enquiry. For the same reason, I congratulate this Society on the salutary prudence of the question which forms the basis of this evening's debate; a question which thus wisely conducts us from the glittering track of metaphysical sterility, to the more productive field of home investigation. KNOW THYSELF, is the first precept of wisdom: and to this knowledge of ourselves, to a knowledge of our civil and political situations, a due discussion of the present question will enable us to arrive. For the

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question is not simply, whether an individual, of the name of Horne Tooke, has or has not been aggrieved, but, whether a great people are fairly represented, and justly governed? or whether, on the contrary, abused by the mere phantom of freedom, and gulled by the bombast of a certain *constitutional cant*, they have sunk into lethargic security, while their persons and property are oppressed by the most unblushing system of speculation that ever usurped the name of Government?

From this enquiry nothing can arise but good. If it shall appear that Mr. Horne Tooke has founded a false alarm, and that the grievances of which he complains are not founded in fact, we shall then have increased the sum of our happiness, by adding to the real safety of our state, that pleasing sense of security which an accurate inspection of the constitutional fabric shall thus confirm in our minds. If, on the other hand, it shall appear that the very pillars of the State are rotten and corrupt, we shall then have discovered the cause of our decay; to apply the remedy, remains with us.

In this Society, I doubt not, that the question will undergo that free and candid discussion which its importance certainly demands. Here, at least, we may deliver with impunity our sentiments. Here, I hope, are no fastidious ears to startle at the dictates of truth; here are no selfish interests, no anti-social privileges, no pitiful etiquette to repel the solicitations

solicitations of humanity and justice. Here we shall not, by threats of fines, of imprisonment, and of pillory, be deterred from exalting the voice of freedom; nor shall the hard gripe of Despotism dare, in this place, to seize us by the throat, and command us to bury in the depth of our bosom, the silent sense of our wrongs and our oppression.

I am no orator, Gentlemen, nor ever, except upon this question, have I risen in public to deliver my sentiments on any subject whatever. But so closely connected do I feel the present object of your debate, with the dearest interest of my heart, the cause of freedom, that I cannot resist the temptation of hazarding, on this occasion, a few rude observations. Your indulgence, however, I shall endeavour to merit by the brevity of my discourse, and by a strict adherence to plain common sense, which I take to be the true touchstone of all political institutions, and of every form of government whatever.

I come, therefore, bluntly to the question; and I declare, that after perusing with attention the petition of Mr. Horne Tooke, I cannot but consider it as the most direct and daring libel on the House of Commons that ever ventured within the walls of St. Stephen's Chapel. I repeat it, the most direct and daring libel on the House of Commons, for it is the truth itself; and according to the doctrine of our Lawyers, and to the present practice of

our Courts, the truer the assertion, the greater is the libel.

Mr. Horne Tooke has the audacity to complain, that parliamentary elections are in general conducted by the most shameful modes of bribery and corruption. And who is there so blindly bigoted to the present order of things as to deny the fact, or so lost in political sycophancy as not to confess the justice of this complaint?

Mr. Horne Tooke complains also, that the citizens are prevented, by armed force, from availing themselves of their rights, and that murders have been committed with impunity, by ruffians hired to impede the freedom of election. And have we not seen the bludgeoned banditti of both factions (for I am willing to divide the blame equally between them both), have we not seen them marshalled under their respective leaders, block up every passage to the hustings, and rush to the combat, like two contending armies in the field of battle? The timid, the moderate, and the prudent citizens in general, avoided a scene of violence and uproar, and cursed, from the bottom of their hearts, a brutal anarchy, more oppressive, if possible, than absolute despotism itself. In fine, Mr. Horne Tooke asserts, that the majority of seats in the House of Commons are bought and sold like stalls for cattle at a fair. And is not this a notorious fact, which all the world know as well as Mr. Horne Tooke?

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but which, till now, in the face of that corrupt and all-corrupting Assembly, no man but Mr. Horne Tooke has yet had the patriotic hardihood to assert. Whatever, therefore, it may be deemed in the selfish sophistry of parliamentary jobbers, or in the pitiful chicane of legal tyranny, at least, in the language of common sense, in which truth is no libel, the petition of Mr. Horne Tooke will not be considered as a libellous attack on the House of Commons, but as a just statement of the vices of the Constitution, and of the public grievances arising from the unequal and unfair representation, or rather from the mock representation of the people.

I should, perhaps, make an apology for the naked simplicity of my discourse; but as in the present critical fluctuation of the public mind, a small instillation of simple truth would be attended by more salutary effects than a torrent of eloquence, I shall beg leave to trespass a little longer on your indulgence, by a few remarks on the representation of this country.

And here, Gentlemen, I must request, that you will suffer me to deliver my sentiments in plain English, a language that was perfectly innocent to the ears of our forefathers, however harsh it may grate on the auricular delicacy of modern refinement. I could never learn any other dialect; and except you permit me to mention things by their proper name, I hold it better to break off here, than
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to hazard your offence by proceeding farther.

Representation presupposes election; for no man can justly act for another, except he has been chosen and deputed by him for that purpose. This proposition seems of itself so very clear, as to stand in need of no farther illustration: However, to set the matter in the clearest point of view, let us suppose that a man should take upon himself to manage the affairs of a person by whom he was not appointed, that he should collect his rents, distribute his property, and even levy a tax on the produce of his personal labour; would you view such a man in the light of a lawful agent? or would you regard him as a robber and a thief, who had invaded, under a false pretence, the property of another?

But the Representatives of the People are the Agents of the Public; they manage the common stock, and this common stock consists of the collective wealth of all the individuals. Every individual therefore should have a voice in the appointment of the common agents of all. No, say some, with an air of triumph, Those only should have a right to vote, who are men of property. But pray is there any man without property? Is not the daily labour of the peasant, or the mechanic, as much his property, and as precious to him, as the wide possessions or funded wealth of the landholder,

holder, or man of money? Is not the poor man, whose very existence depends on the wisdom or folly of Administration, at least as much interested in the right management of government, as he whose superfluities alone are endangered by its imprudence? The tax which lessens the luxuries of the Son of Wealth, and thins a little the crowd of his lacqueys, shall rob the poor man of his morsel of bread, and turn his wife and children naked into the street. But not only is the substance of the poor man perpetually exposed to depredation, (and the whole speculation of Government will be found to fall ultimately on the poorer classes of citizens), but he is every moment liable to pay with his blood, the price of ministerial mismanagement. Let us suppose that a weak or a wicked Prince, (and too many royal monsters have disgraced the throne of these kingdoms), let us suppose, I say, that a weak or a wicked King, an ambitious Minister, a rapacious Aristocracy, should think fit (for all or each of these are able) to plunge the nation into war; where, pray, would they find the victims of their ambition? Among the rich? No certainly. The rich man redeems his service with a piece of silver. His blood is too precious to be spilt in the quarrels which he fomented, and from which he alone can derive the least advantage. The demons of havoc and massacre must rest satisfied with the ransom of viler victims. For the benefit of
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the rich, the luxurious and the idle, the sweat of the labouring poor must always ooze from every pore; but now, to gratify the cruel thirst of ambition, not their sweat only, but their very blood must flow. To inveigle the poor man into their bands of mercenary murderers, every art, every species of fraud, is set on foot. To delude him from his fire-side, from the bosom of his wife and children, the gay phantom of glory is made to dance before his sight. His avarice is roused, his weaknesses are watched, his nakedness is espied, his moments of relaxation are way-laid; if in the narrow path of his daily duties, he should chance to make a single indiscreet step to the right or to the left, he falls into the man-traps of an abominable craft, and is doomed to increase the number of those unfortunate men, who receive a daily starvation of bread and water, in order to sharpen their souls to that ferocity of wretchedness, to which, to butcher a fellow-man, or to fall by his hand, are alike unimportant.

But the poor man is liable not only to be cheated of his liberty, and tricked into this sanguinary service; but, more atrocious still, he is hunted down like a wild beast, he is torn from his family, he is dragged by ruffians in the broad face of day, in the sight of his countrymen and fellow-citizens, he is dragged like a murderer along the streets—like a sheep doomed for slaughter, he is

thrown down the dark dungeon of a floating jail, amidst a suffocating crowd of unhappy men like himself. If he survives this horrible trial, he is sent aboard one of those royal slaughter-houses of our seamen, a man of war. If from the dangers of war and the perils of the deep also he chances to escape, as soon as his service can be dispensed with, he is sent ashore—to be hanged. He was guilty of theft you will say, he committed robbery. But what could he do? He found himself thrown adrift upon the wide world: without money, without friends, without resources, and, unable to find employment, he was urged by hunger to overleap the iron barriers of property. For his crime (if that to which a dire necessity compels can be called a crime) he made atonement by death. And yet his honest and ingenuous soul would have chosen rather to wither with famine, than to be guilty of an action that was coupled with disgrace;—but he was driven to despair, by a calamity which human nature is ill able to support. After the fatigue of a long and comfortless journey, he arrived at length at that peaceful cottage, from whence a few months before he had been dragged by the cruel hand of power. He approached his humble habitation, but his soul sunk with sad forebodings at sight of that cot which was wont to make his heart leap with joy. He approached his humble habitation—but no fond wife flew to his embrace. He entered,

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and his fire-side was silent. Where art thou, my love! he exclaimed with a faltering voice. Alas! she was no more!—Deprived of his protection, robbed of his support, bereaved of the cheering smiles of the husband of her heart, she had sunk down to an early grave. In the narrow dwelling of death her sorrows are composed. But first, O woeful sight! she had seen her babe expire upon her breast; she had seen languish on her bosom, the fruit of her virgin love, and wither by the springs of nourishment which nature had provided, but which grief and indigence had dried up.

This is no tale of artificial sorrow, no eloquent fiction of splendid distress, no *delightful vision* made to dance on the horizon of vanity, but a frequent, a lamentable fact, which appeals simply to the honest and uncorrupted feelings of the heart. Here are no royal gew-gaws, it is true, to dazzle the understanding, no dagger to glitter through the shining superficies of courtly pamphlets; but yet I hope, to every man that will open the eyes of his understanding, and whose bowels are not inexorably shut, the plain story of humble griefs will be sufficient to prove how necessary it is to protect by every possible means, the political weakness of poverty, from the insults, the outrages, and the cruel oppression of the powerful and the rich. If there be any class of men that might with some degree of safety be left without a voice in the government,

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it is the opulent ; for in all governments not absolutely despotic, the opulent are sufficiently protected by their wealth.

We may, therefore, I think, without presumption, assume it as a principle in a free State, *first*, That every man shall be actually represented.

Secondly, That all the Members of the State shall have an *equal* vote in the election of their representatives ; for, the man that has not a vote, is not represented at all ; and if any man is permitted to have more than one vote, then the people are not *fairly* represented.

And now, where shall we find the representatives of the people of England ? In the Parliament no doubt. But the Parliament consists of three powers ; the King, the Lords, and the Commons. Does the King represent the people ? The King, I reply, is indeed appointed to enforce the laws, but not deputed to enact them.

Are the people represented by the Lords ? No, certainly ; for the Lords are not elected by the people. They are the mere creatures of the Crown, and a part of that regal pageantry, to support which, the people are so shamefully taxed, and so cruelly curtailed of the comforts, and even of the necessities of life. The Lords, in short, are a privileged tribe of men totally distinct from the people. A Peer is a sort of political monster, who is born a law giver, sucks from his nurse's breast the

wisdom of legislation, and comes into Parliament to represent himself. If he represents any body whatever, it must be those Danish, Saxon, or Norman pirates, who, at different periods, invaded this country, pillaged and reduced to slavery the natives, and having acquired a larger share of booty than their brother Buccaneers, became Barons, and trampled with the foot of pride on the neck of the humbled inhabitants. Whether our most Noble Lords, Dukes, Earls, &c. have much reason to boast the honour of representing those vagabond robbers of antiquity, I shall not pretend to decide ; but certainly this is the only representation to which they have any reasonable claim.

The absurdity of an hereditary nobility has, from its first institution, been fully demonstrated. Let us now examine whether the establishment of any privileged cast of men whatever, can be reconciled to the principles of justice, or of freedom. Two things, I think, will be allowed to belong to a man by the most sacred right, his purse, and his opinion. To tax a man without his consent, is to plunder him ; but is it not infinitely more tyrannical to forbid the operation of his mind, and to rob him of that right of estimation and discrimination, which every man, and even many animals, possess from nature, and which of all things should be free and spontaneous ? But here, under the character of a Minister, or with the more august appellation of
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of Monarch, a man comes forward, and putting round the neck of another man a red or blue riband, or affixing a glittering bauble to his breast; behold! he exclaims, a GREAT MAN! But let not your saucy thoughts dare to estimate the work of my hands; let it suffice that I tell you, here is a Great Man—approach him with reverence; address him with much fearful circumlocution; call him your Lord, even if he should be the lowest lackey in my presence; and salute him by the title of his Grace, his Highness, his Excellency, were he the veriest dunce, or the most abandoned wretch in my dominions. What a barbarous refinement of tyranny is this! But you are not obliged, it will be said, you are not obliged to any thing more than the mere exterior symbols of respect; your internal sentiments may breathe the most profound contempt, at the very moment that your outward deportment denotes the most profound veneration. This, indeed, is the privilege of a slave, to curse in his heart the hand which he kisses with ostentatious respect. But is it then a small grievance to be compelled to act the hypocrite, to counterfeit esteem, and to make one's lips and gestures give the lie to the dictates of his conscience! Thus it is that we establish for ourselves a necessity of dissimulation—Hence the pollution of the public manners; hence that perpetual reciprocity of sycophancy, which poisons the social converse of men; hence that spirit of duplicity

city which pervades the common intercourse of life, and which renders our language fallacious, and our actions dishonest. Thus we find, that the establishment of a privileged caste of men is not only incompatible with freedom, but also irreconcilable with good morals.

But, fondly and childishly attached to the glare of distinctions, to the splendid baubles of nobility, some people perhaps will say, we acknowledge the absurdity of lavishing titles at the caprice of an individual; but, cannot you let us have a virtuous noblesse created by the voice of the people? No; certainly, and for this obvious reason, that the voice of the people cannot give permanency to the characters of men. The man who merits to-day the civic crown, may to-morrow incur our contempt. Thus it is necessary, for the good of society, that the estimation of every individual should ever depend upon the continued testimony of his life, and the probation of his fellow-citizens. The approbation of his fellow-citizens will convey to his heart a felicity, to his soul an elevation, which the smiles of Princes never could bestow; at his demise, the gratitude of the people will place the patriot among the Gods.

In short, in a state really free, a privileged caste of men cannot possibly exist; for it could never enter into the minds of free people to establish so absurd a barrier between man and man. In a free state, there is but one class of
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men, which is that of the citizen; as there is but one will, which is that of the people. No sooner was the French nation fairly represented, than the order of the Noblesse was abolished; and whenever the people of this country shall obtain an equal representation, our Barons must also bid adieu to their political existence. And surely in the real blessings of equality, and in the manly spirit of independence, they will find an ample compensation for those Gothic badges of barbarian insolence, and for that vain ostentation of courtly bondage which degrades, while it renders them at the same time an object of merited malevolence.

Since it clearly appears that the people are not represented either by the King or the House of Lords, let us next examine whether or not they are represented by the House of Commons. In the first place, then, the House of Commons are chosen by a number of Electors, not exceeding, at a very extravagant calculation, an hundredth part of the people of Great Britain. At best, therefore, the House of Commons can represent *only* an Aristocracy consisting of an hundredth part of the people.

But even this domineering Aristocracy are not fairly represented by the House of Commons; for, so unequally is the representation distributed, that in some places half a dozen individuals have the privilege of sending two Members to Parliament, while in other places this privilege is diluted among 50 or 100,000 Electors. From this farcical mode of election, it is easy to conceive by what means the whole

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representation of this country has fallen into the hands of a few great families, and that seats in the House of Commons, as Mr. Horne Tooke observes, are bought and sold like stalls for cattle at a fair.

But even this phantom of election is rendered still more illusive by the limitations prescribed to the choice of the small portion of Electors who have in this country the right of voting.—I mean that regulation of Parliament which narrows the choice of the Electors to a certain circle of the Aristocracy, consisting of men possessed of at least three hundred pounds *per annum*; (though in fact an income much more considerable is required to obtain admission into that Assembly.) Now, to say nothing of the scandalous immorality of this regulation, which degrades and stigmatizes that state of poverty which is often the portion of liberal and of honest minds; for I will not say, that, to hoard up wealth, and to retain at the same time the fund of probity undiminished, is a thing impossible; but to the experience, and to the conscience of this Assembly, I appeal, whether it be not a thing extremely difficult indeed*:—but not, I say, to insist on the scandalous immorality of a regulation which stigmatizes an honourable state of poverty, and which, by holding up to our view wealth as the criterion of worth, debauches the people, and impoisons the public

* For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God.

St. Luke, C. 18. v. 25.

mind with a false opinion of the excellence of riches, an opinion that is the source of almost every vice and every crime that disturbs the peace of society; without, I say, insisting at present on this important point, I cannot help remarking, and remarking with indignation, the shameless injustice, the execrable cruelty of an act which thus compels the People to resign the care of their dearest concerns, into the hands of the very persons who profit by their misery, and who fatten on their distress. Are the flock to be defended by wolves? Are the monopolizers of land, the monopolizers of money, the monopolizers of traffic, the proper Representatives of a People, who are crushed, oppressed, and even famished by the monopolies of money, of traffic, and of land?

To represent a man, is to know his situation, to be well informed of his concerns, to feel his interests, to wish ardently for his welfare. But how can the natives of Nova Zembla be represented by the inhabitants of Arabia the Happy? Or can those who bask in the sunshine of fortune, and who recline in the lap of pleasure, represent the children of toil, who shiver in the frigid zone of misery, and who pine in the bleak abodes of want? When, in order to represent humanity, the God of Love descended upon earth, he became a man of sorrow, and was acquainted with grief; but amongst us, no man is accounted fit to represent the people, except he

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be lifted above their condition, and a stranger to their distresses. Hence it is, that the nick-named representation of this country is engrossed, for the greater part, by those devourers of the people, who, by adding inheritance to inheritance, farm to farm, and monopoly to monopoly, have deprived their fellow-men of the common inheritance of nature, and reduced their equals to a condition little better than that of the domestic brutes, who sweat under the iniquitous loads of avarice, and smart incessantly to the cruel stripes of drunken arrogance. They have divided the earth amongst them, as if it were the patrimony of a few individuals, and not the common inheritance of the human race. Defrauded, even before their birth, of their share of the genial gifts of nature, entire generations rise, and sink again into earth, without having proved a single joy, or tasted in their cheerless journey through life, other beverage than the bitter potion of toil, and pain, and disappointment. To add insult to their misery, they are told, that “ the
 “ people must respect that property of which
 “ they cannot partake. They must labour to
 “ obtain what by labour they can obtain, and
 “ and when they find, as they commonly do,
 “ the success disproportioned to their endeavour,
 “ they must be taught their consolation
 “ in the final proportion of eternal justice*.”

* Burke's Reflections on the French Revolution.

O cruel and inhuman decree ! The great mass of mankind must pine in perpetual indigence, in order that the unfeeling few may wallow in wealth. They must pine; but they must not mourn over their miseries. They must endure with patience, the hard pressure of accumulating distress; but they must not stir a finger to ease the burthen that bows them down to the earth. Their only consolation shall be this, that in some future state of things, their oppressors shall suffer tenfold the pains which now they inflict. And indeed if mortal eye could penetrate the deep mists of futurity, if to mortal ear the voice of the world to come could ascend, if the spectres of horror were visible to our view, if we could hear the dread warning of the bottomless abyss, if we saw the tyrant stretched upon the wheel, and heard the shrieks of the sycophant who had perverted the gifts of eloquence to justify oppression, and to extinguish the light of liberty in the soul, (and surely if mortal guilt could merit immortality of pain, this, and no other, must be the crime), then indeed we should have an example that would cause the oppressor to shrink from his murderous meditation, a lesson that would deter from purposed wrong the sons of violence; the lords of the earth would learn justice, and reverence the will of God*. But far,

* *Discite justitiam moniti, nec temnere divos.*

Virgil.

alas! from human ken, are removed the decrees of fate! On the dubious and fluctuating contemplation of futurity, the thick clouds of darkness roll impervious to the feeble ray of human wisdom. The timid and conscientious multitude, amid the deep mist of uncertainty, discern forms of fear, and menacing ministers of wrath; but, drunk with the beverage of prosperity, the oppressors of the poor say to themselves, it is the tale of ignorance, the crude exhalation of a dream, which the first beam of the morning will dissipate, which the dawn of reason chases from the mind.

But I return, Mr. Chairman, from this digression, into which I have been impelled by an indignation which I hope this Assembly will pardon, and which, I doubt not, they participate with me, against those cruel and slavish doctrines, which a certain Don Quixote of despotism has lately dared to vindicate to the world. I shall offer one reason more, and that a most conclusive one, to prove that the House of Commons, even in their best and most uncorrupt state, never did, nor ever can represent the people of Great Britain. The House of Commons form one-third part only of the Legislature of this country; but whenever the people shall be fairly represented, their Representatives will not form one-third part only, but the whole of the Legislature; for the will of a free people is the Law. This is an argument which no sophistry can evade, and
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which, in the eye of the common sense of mankind, will appear equal in certainty to the mathematical demonstration, that a part is not equal to the whole.

Having proved that the people are not represented by the King, nor by the House of Commons, nor by the Lords, it follows of course, that they are not represented at all. Some election-monger, perhaps, will reply, that though the King, the Lords and Commons do not separately represent the people, yet that, joined together in Parliament, they are the Representatives of the people. In answer to this, it will be quite sufficient to produce this fact, that ninety-nine of the people out of one hundred, have no vote nor political existence whatever*. Perhaps the parliamentary sophist will still urge, that although the people be not *really* represented in Parliament, yet they are *virtually* represented there. But what avails to the people this ideal representation, if they are not in practice really represented, but neglected and betrayed by those who force themselves upon them as their Representatives, *and tell them 'tis their charter?* And what is the meaning of this cant phrase of virtual representation? It is that sort of representation, we shall be told,

* In Great Britain, consisting of eight millions of inhabitants, 6087 persons elect a majority of the House of Commons. This is clearly made out in the Political Disquisitions, Vol. I. b. 2. c. 4. a work full of important and useful instruction,

by which Adam represented the human race. And a very *damnable* mode of representation it was, as the event has proved.

But we appeal, say the borough-jobbers, we appeal to the virtual effects of this representation, effects as salutary as the most equal representation could possibly produce. And what are the effects of this virtual representation?—A venal Parliament, a corrupt Aristocracy, an oppressed People. But corruption, they reply, is an essential ingredient of good Government, and the accumulation of taxes a *stimulus* to public industry. According to this mode of reasoning, disease is better than health, vice is preferable to virtue, and slavery is superior to freedom. But if to increase the necessity of labour, and to render mankind the mere drudges of the State, be the grand purpose of Government, why do they not introduce amongst us that effectual *stimulus* to industry, I mean the scourge, which they have dared to sanction against the backs of our fellow-creatures in another quarter of the globe? Why do they not, by one bold blow, add to the grand monopoly of the rich, the little remains of landed property which the people are still permitted to possess? Why do they not at once deprive us of that slender portion which the progressive inroads of taxation have not wrested from our hands? They have reduced us to the hard condition of daily labourers; they have imposed upon our necks the cruel necessity of eternal toil; they

they have even forced us to the contumelious condition of caterers for their vices; they have compelled us to dig from the very dunghill of their infamy, the means of our subsistence. They have made us a people of pedlars, of taylors, of weavers, of barbers, of brokers, of lackeys, of gamblers, of man-milliners, and if ought can derogate still more from the dignity of man. They have even poisoned the solace of human life, and polluted, by their imperious lusts, the source of domestic consolation: they have debauched the female mind, and poured forth on our streets a deluge of prostitution. Would to God they would relieve us from the ignominy of a seeming consent to such enormities, by depriving us of every species of free will, and by reducing us to the mere automaton state of slavery, save us from the blush of being in any respect accessory to things, which either to act or to suffer, are alike disgraceful to human nature!—But, no; they are too well convinced how much this phantom of freedom favours the purposes of speculation; and they know, that under the disguise of liberty, they have dared to carry their oppression farther than ever downright despotism would have ventured to proceed*. I defy any person to
produce,

* This is a fact which several of the Members of Parliament have not scrupled to confess. On a late debate in the House of Commons, on the Russian war,

“ Sir James St. Clair Erskine was sorry to observe,
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produce, from the most despotic States, an instance of a nation labouring under such accumulated taxes and consequent distress, as that which presses upon the people of Great Britain. One half of the *quantum* of our grievances was found sufficient to overthrow the fabric of French tyranny*; one half of the misery under which we groan, would raise, in the most absolute governments of Asia, a cry of Vengeance! which would cause the tyrant to totter on his throne.

I have travelled over a large portion of the empire of Turkey, one of the most despotic countries in the world; and the relative situation of the people of Turkey, and that of England, appears to me to stand nearly as follows.—In Turkey, I found that a peasant or labouring mechanic, by three or four days moderate labour in the week, could maintain two, and sometimes three or four wives, and a numerous family of children: In England, on the contrary, the peasant or mechanic is often deterred from marriage by the difficulty of obtaining bread; and should he venture upon a wife, he finds that six days incessant labour scarcely enables him to support his family through the

that the House of Commons was become a mere engine in the hands of the ministry, for the purpose of extorting money from the people under the shew and phantom of freedom, and for oppressing the people with taxes, which, were he possessed of absolute power, he would not dare to impose." *GAZETTEER*, 16th April.

* See Thoughts on Government, by George Rous, Esq.

week.

week. In Turkey, the great body of the people participate largely in all the natural productions of the country: In England, on the contrary, the peasant, or labouring mechanic, is seldom permitted to indulge in the comforts of his climate, procured as they are by the labour of his hands: his coarse and scanty fare is composed of a few articles of absolute necessity; Butter (especially since the poor have been legally robbed of the right of common) very rarely forms a part of his food, except perhaps that unwholesome and unpalatable species of butter which salt arrests in a certain stage of putrefaction; Cheese, except of the driest and most insipid sort, seldom enters his lips, and with a kind of corrupt water, called small beer, instead of the natural beverage of milk, he is forced to feed his unfortunate progeny. In Turkey, a man may be poor with impunity: a moderate man may sit down unmolested, in the philosophic enjoyments of temperance; and leisure rendered grateful, by the vicissitude of toil without fatigue. But in England, where the poor are persecuted as much as they are despised, relaxation from labour is a blessing which they never can enjoy. In such a country as this, it would be in vain for a man to say, My desires are far removed from the paths of ambition, I am satisfied with the simple produce of my garden; why, then, should I toil for ever?—But you must labour for me, cries his Grace the Archbishop—and

for me, cries the exciseman—and for me, says the custom-house officer—and for me, and for me, and for me, exclaim a crowd of court parasites, and royal mermydons; so that after submitting to their claims, and satisfying the demands of the landed pensioner, the poor man finds, that, of six days incessant toil, nothing remains to himself and his unhappy family, but a little black bread to moisten with their tears. Well may he say, in the words of a sacred writer, “That which the palmer worm hath left, hath the locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left, hath the canker-worm eaten; and that which the canker-worm hath left, hath the caterpillar eaten.” Nay, according to Mr. Young, who has accurately studied the situation of the peasant, he has not always a sufficient portion even of common bread. What is the reason that the balance of enjoyment should preponderate so much in the scale of despotism? The reason is plainly this: In Turkey, the arm of despotism bears hard upon the rich; in England, the aristocracy of the rich is oppressive to the poor. Does the Pacha of a province stand in need of money? He sends for a dozen of opulent infidel merchants, Christians or Jews; he sponges them without ceremony, and then returns them to the tide of traffic, to imbibe fresh wealth, and to prepare for another squeeze. This is certainly an act of oppression and injustice; but very limited, however, in its operation, and by which the great mass of public felicity is
very

very little diminished. In England, on the contrary, where an aristocracy of wealth prevails over all, the few rich flourish in security, and riot in every possible enjoyment; but the great mass of the people is cruelly harassed and oppressed. In Turkey, the tyger Despotism springs upon his single victim, and gluts himself with carnage; but in England, the monster Aristocracy, extending over the devoted million her ten thousand fangs, sucks from every pore of the people, a never-ceasing stream of blood. In Turkey, the *quantum* of sufferance is determined by the common sense and common feelings of mankind; particular acts of state-oppression are permitted to pass with impunity; but the moment that the tyrant begins to lay a heavy hand upon the *many*, the mussulmans run instantly to arms, and the despot is deprived of life, or at least expelled from his government. But in England, the people appear to have lost every natural criterion of right and wrong; they cannot tell whether they are oppressed or not, without consulting certain musty records, which form the basis of what they call their Constitution; a thing which nobody understands, and which only serves to afford their politicians a subject of eternal wrangling, and their ministers an opportunity of plundering the nation without risque.

We will admit, say the borough-mongers, that some abuses have crept into the government of this country; but then we contend,

that the Constitution of England, in its purity, is established on the most perfect principles of freedom. Vain and fallacious supposition! which deludes the multitude, and has impeded, more than any other cause, the progress of liberty in Great Britain. On what is your boasted Constitution established? On the *Magna Charta*, and the *Petition of the Bill of Rights*.—Is then the whole fabric of English freedom founded on a piece of parchment, which your barbarian barons forced from the reluctant hand of a feeble tyrant? Have you no better warrant for your liberty, than the gracious pleasure of an alien prince, who granted your petition, and subscribed your BILL of RIGHTS?—Alas! these are puny pretensions to liberty, pretensions by which you can never merit the name of a free people, an appellation which henceforward those only can claim, who scorn to ground their Constitution on any other basis but the natural and indefeasible RIGHTS of MAN.

I shall be told perhaps, that although we do not, like the French nation, derive from first principles the maxims of our Constitution, yet the liberty of the subject is admirably protected by positive laws; and then perhaps we shall hear a very mysterious story about the miraculous balance of the three powers, that wonderfully promote the purpose of political harmony, by running counter to each other. In the plain simplicity of my understanding, however, I

had imagined that the end of a good government consisted in giving a free and unimpeded operation to the *will of the people*; and that whatever tended to obstruct the operation of the public will, must belong to usurpation and tyranny. But if these boasted checks did ever really operate, if this government of warfare did ever practically exist, the action and re-action of so many complicated springs must at length have worn out the machine; at least the present government is conducted on principles as simple as can well be imagined. His Majesty's Prime Minister comes down to the House of Commons, with measures previously concerted in the King's Cabinet: he proposes his Bills; and the House exclaims, what a prodigy of wisdom! he makes his motion, and his motion is carried by a great majority, as virtuous as *unbought*. A similar farce is carried on in the House of Lords; and the will of the Cabinet is proclaimed as the will of the People, who perhaps all the while are lifting their voice against the measure, and execrating its author. This is a thing too notorious to stand in need of illustration.

But, with permission of the sanctioned corporations of politicians, we will now examine with a little more attention, this gainful object of their worship, the Constitution, composed as it is, of King, Lords, and Commons.

I am no enemy to Kings; nor do I think it of any consequence whether the chief
magistrate

magistrate of a State be known by the name of King, Emperor, Dey, Doge, or President. The word King, Kong or Kan, was applied in the most ancient times, and in almost every part of the world, to the chiefs of families or tribes; they were in fact the patriarchs of an early stage of society. These are a sort of Kings for whom I entertain a profound veneration: but there is also a kind of King who cannot be considered otherwise than as an animal of the most pernicious nature, and an enemy to the human race. This devourer of the people is thus justly described by the Prophet Samuel—

“ And he said, this will be the manner of the king that shall rule over you: he will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his chariots.

“ And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots.

“ And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers.

“ And he will take your fields and your vineyards, and your olive-yards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants.

“ And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers and to his servants.

“ And

“ And he will take your men servants and your maid servants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work.

“ He will take the tenth of your sheep, and ye shall be his servants.

“ And ye shall cry out in that day, because of your king, which ye shall have chosen; and the Lord will not hear you in that day.”

Now, if such be the hard condition of a people under a King *chosen* by the people, what are we to expect from a King, who, as Mr. Burke tells us, should hold his crown *in contempt* of the people? Would it be surprising that the land were filled with armed mercenaries, that the produce of the field were eaten up by the locusts of excise, that the luxurious retainers of a court should forestall the hopes of the husbandman, and devour the bread of the industrious and the poor? Could we wonder that places of great honour and trust were filled by sycophants and ideots; or that the appellation of *most noble, most excellent, most honourable*, were applied to persons engaged in offices of servitude, which a man who had the smallest spark of freedom in his bosom would blush to exercise? I have heard of a Roman Emperor, (his name I think was Julian), who having sent for a barber, was amazed to see enter his apartment, a person richly dressed, and with a sword by his side. “ I sent,” said the

the astonished Emperor, (who having been suddenly called from the philosophic sobriety of an academic life at Athens, to the government of the world, was as yet unaccustomed to the magnificence of a court); "I sent," said he, "for a barber to shave me, and not for a field-marshal to deliberate on the state of the army." How much would this simple man of an Emperor have been astonished to find in the most petty courts of modern Europe, the menial offices of domestic servitude performed by most noble Dukes, Earls, Counts! and how would his generous bosom have burned with indignation, to learn that each of those preposterous ministers of vanity consumed, in the course of a month, more perhaps than five hundred honest men could earn in a twelvemonth by the sweat of their brow!

It must certainly give the greatest satisfaction to every lover of his country, to learn, that his most gracious Majesty entertains sentiments not inferior in simplicity and benevolence to those of the good Emperor whom I just mentioned. He is said to delight in the story of the frugality of Spartan royalty, and to admire above all, the Constitution of the United States of America, where the chief magistrate is satisfied with a salary of five thousand pounds per annum, and where the whole executive government is conducted at the very moderate annual expence of seventy thousand pounds. His Majesty, I am
also

also informed, rejoices beyond measure in the late glorious Revolution in France, and pants for that happy day when he also shall become like Louis XVI. the father of a regenerated people! On that glorious day, no doubt, he will thus address his fellow-citizens: "My children! behold a little hoard which I subtracted from the prodigality of courtiers and the rapacity of Ministers; behold here are ten or twelve millions, a little rivulet of wealth, which I turned aside from the broad stream of ministerial corruption: not to flow into my coffers (for how could I encrease my store with the plunder of an oppressed people?) but to fertilize, at some future day, that regenerated state of things which I was convinced the general corruption would very shortly produce*. That day, that happy day of renovation is now come!—take therefore this little treasure (which I cherish merely for the good to which it is going to con-

* The dissoluteness of public manners in this country has been urged as an unsurmountable obstacle to reformation; but a contrary inference is much more consonant to the testimony of history, and to the nature of things; for in the moral, as well as in the physical world, corruption is the certain forerunner of regeneration. The Commonwealth of France has risen, as every body knows, from the very sink of moral depravity; and the Spartans were labouring under all the evils of luxury, and ruined by their own vices, when they committed to Lycurgus the reformation of the State, and agreed to establish their virtue and their freedom on the best of all possible foundations, an equal participation of property.

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tribute);

tribute); apply it to the faithful performance of those engagements which we, or rather our forefathers, have contracted for us with the public creditor. Apply it, I say, to the extinction of the national debt;—but let us disclaim, henceforward, the ruinous practice of anticipating the public revenues: let us gamble no longer with the lives and fortunes of our fellow-citizens; let us not lay up a fund of calamities for our unfortunate children; in fine, let us not imitate the unjust and unfeeling conduct of our fathers, who, not satisfied with the spendthrift dissipation of their own estates, have left us also to pay the sad reckoning of their riots, their drunkenness, their folly!”

I return from this digression, into which I have been led by the delightful anticipation of future good, to consider another important point of what is called the Constitution of England. This point is the non-responsibility of the Chief Magistrate.

Either the King is possessed of powers necessary to the conduct of Government, or he is not: if the latter, is it not cruel and unjust to extort from the nation the enormous sum of a million and a half per annum for the maintenance of a mere pageant not in the least necessary to the conduct of public affairs? But, if he be really possessed of great powers (as most certainly he is), why, in the name of common sense, should the Chief Magistrate, whose errors of course must be more pernicious than those of the subordinate officers of the executive

cutive power ; why, I say, should he be exempted from that responsibility to which they very justly must submit ? The King, you say, can do no wrong. Cannot the King make war ? Has he not solely a power over the throats of the people ?——Yes ; but the House of Commons hold the purse, and may refuse the Supplies.——But what avails the privilege of holding the public purse (were it even held with integrity), if the Minister can at any time commit the honour of the nation ? if, by foreign treaties, by intrigues, by cabal, by unprovoked hostilities, he can draw down upon you the vengeance of half the globe, and reduce you to the cruel necessity of defending against half the world, your possessions, your independence, and even your existence.

Strange infatuation ! a dirty canal cannot without the concurrence of Parliament, be carried across a few acres of land ; but the Minister may open, when he pleases, the veins of the people, and bid the blood of the citizen flow through every quarter of the globe !——Should the reason of your Chief Magistrate suffer an eclipse, and the royal maniac should begin to sport a little too roughly with the maids of honour, and to kick the titled lacquies about his court, it would be thought necessary to put him in a strait jacket—but why, ye deluded nation ! are his arms unconfined when urged by tenfold frenzy he unfurls the bloody banner of strife, lets loose the hounds of havoc, and

whirling furious in his hand the firebrand of war, involves in ruin and desolation half the habitable globe?

Thanks to the glorious Revolution of France! thanks to the enlightened labours of the National Assembly! we may now hope to see the day when neither the intrigues of a court parasite, the electioneering interests of a minister, nor the vile machinations of contractors, brokers, Jews, shall prevail to arm brother against brother, and to render man the greatest enemy of man. The interests of the people (which are every where the same) shall soon cease to be sacrificed to the domineering lusts of a few, and the LAW, which is the voice of the people,—and all other authority is not law but usurpation and tyranny—the LAW shall establish peace and good-will among men. Such, O thou Soul of Benevolence! now united to the eternal source of UNIVERSAL GOOD: such, O PRICE, was the pious end to which were devoted the labours of thy life; such were the heart-cheering hopes that supported thy meek spirit under the cruel calumny of those who hated thee, because they feared the light, and were enemies to the truth!

With respect to the present states of Europe in general, we shall not wander far from the truth, if we regard them not as lawful Governments (for how can the LAW exist where the voice of the people is not heard?) but as so many independent associations of robbers.

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In order to maintain their respective confederacies, they are under the necessity of establishing at home a species of local equity ; but their notions of rectitude have no root in the love of the human race, nor extend beyond the limits of the State. To a certain artificial system of morals they pay a profound respect ; but the real and indefeasible rights of humanity they are ever ready to sacrifice to every sordid interest or ridiculous caprice. The regulations of the banditti must implicitly be obeyed ; but the eternal bonds of nature, the tender sympathies of the heart, may be cut asunder with impunity. As far as that mountain they are bound in some respect to be merciful and upright ; but on the farther side of yonder rivulet they will rob without compunction, and murder without remorse.

I come now to that pretended salvo for all the malversations of government, I mean the responsibility of office. Will the regular corporations of parliamentary politicians permit us to examine in what this responsibility consists, and where it lies ? In the first place, it does not lie with the King, for he is not responsible : nor does it lie with the Minister, for he, honest man ! is entirely guided by the wisdom of Parliament, and acts under their sanction.—The Lords are not responsible, for they represent themselves ; and the Commons are not responsible, for they represent the people ;—that is to say theoretically, or, in other words, by a certain logical

logical fiction, which supposes a fact, and then draws conclusions from that supposition, as if it were really founded in fact. In short, instead of finding responsibility in what is called the English Constitution, I discover a political machine, cunningly contrived, to elude responsibility, and to plunder the people with impunity.—It recalls to my memory a story which I have somewhere read in the Ancient History of Greece. The Athenians (whether impelled by famine or gluttony I do not remember) were desirous of tasting the flesh of the bull (an animal consecrated, in the primitive ages of Greece, to the labours of the field, and which seems, in every country, to have escaped long the slaughter to which almost all other creatures had successively been doomed.) The Athenians wished ardently to feast upon the flesh and to drink the blood of *John Bull*; but like a *wise* and *prudent* people, as they were, they were desirous, at the same time, to avoid the odium of the act, and to feast, if possible, with a quiet conscience. They contrived the business in this manner: they chose a number of virgins (sweet innocent creatures *who could do no wrong*) to bring water to whet the hatchet and the knife. As soon as those weapons were made sharp, one man delivered the axe, another struck the blow, a third cut the bullock's throat. Having *done the deed*, they skinned the animal, and all that were present feasted upon his flesh. After this, they sewed up the skin, stuffing it with straw;

straw; and having set it up, put a plough to its tail, as if it still were alive, and in act to till the ground. Those who had been guilty of the deed, were then called before the tribunal of justice, to answer for themselves. The virgins who brought the water, threw the blame on the persons who had whetted the steel; those, in their turn, shifted the responsibility on the man who delivered the hatchet; he threw the blame on the person who struck the blow; and the latter accused the weapon, which, as it could not answer for itself, was found guilty of the murder, and cast into the sea.

What a wonderful resemblance between the Athenian and the British sacrifice of the bull, even to the worming out his bowels, and setting up a John Bull of straw! There is still another circumstance in which the sacrifice of the real, had a striking likeness to that of the metaphorical, *John Bull*. In order that the sacrifice should be deemed good and acceptable to the gods, it was necessary that the animal should advance without reluctance to the altar, and *submit* his throat to the knife. The interpreter of those signs of consent was the priest,—to whom a fat portion of the sacrifice was set apart. In the same manner, the House of Commons, who *do not* fatten on the blood of the people (and in that the comparison does not hold exactly good); the House of Commons, I say, officiates as priest and judges by the gesticulation of John Bull, whether he is or is not

not willing to be bled. It is curious to observe, that the political priest has never yet found, that the patient animal shrunk from the operation*.

But to return to the petition of Mr. Horne Tooke, have we any reason to hope that it will induce the House of Commons to redress our grievances, by granting to the people an equal representation? I shall beg leave to answer this question by relating a story, a mode of delivering, or rather disguising one's sentiments, invented in the days of slavery, and certainly well adapted to the present day, in which it is almost impossible to deliver one's opinion on affairs, public or private, without incurring the penalty of imprisonment and the terrors of the pillory. But to come to my story:—An Algerine pirate, falling in with an English merchantman, attacked, and after an obstinate engagement, made her a prize. The 'unfortunate crew were plundered, carried into a port of Barbary, and sold for slaves. They contrived, however, to transmit an account of their captivity to the English Consul at Algiers. That gentleman instantly waited upon the Dey, and remonstrated in warm and indignant language on the insult that, contrary to the faith of treaty, had been offered to the nation. The Barbarian Prince, reclining on a

* You see they consider our House of Commons as "a semblance,"—"a form,"—"a theory,"—"a shadow,"—"a mockery," perhaps "a nuisance."—Burke's Reflections, &c. p. 83.

filken sofa, and inhaling through a long tube the grateful fumes of intoxication, heard with much apathy the Consul's glowing remonstrance. As soon as the Englishman had ceased speaking, the Dey, taking the pipe from his mouth, deliberately replied, "My friend, the Algerines, it is true, are great robbers,—AND I AM THEIR CHIEF *!"

Indeed, it appears clearly from the petition itself, that Mr. Horne Tooke had no other object in view (and that certainly was an object of great importance) than to demonstrate to the people the absurdity of similar applications. To speak the truth, a parliamentary reform may serve to amuse, for a time, the people (and no doubt the Ministry will soon find it convenient to play off some such farce upon the public), but can never remedy the defects, nor eradicate the deep-rooted vices of the Government; vices of which those very political corporations are no inconsiderable part. Our evils are beyond the reach of those time-serving expedients, and the enlarged and liberal sentiments of the present age have left far behind that pitiful sort of selfish prudence which governs the conduct of those who have converted Government into a gainful monopoly. Our only hopes of renovation—shall I dare to give utterance to that which every mind conceives, and to which are turned the desires

* See Shaw's Travels in Barbary.

of every heart—our only hopes of renovation are suspended on a NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. There the voice of the poor will be heard against his privileged oppressor; there the language of common-sense will take place of a senseless jargon about prerogative, privilege, *lex parliamenti*, confidence in Ministers; there the interest of rotten boroughs and aristocratic corporations will give way to the good of the people, and in short, the whole system of sanctioned robbery will vanish before the *rights of man* and the great interests of humanity.

He that does not foresee a grand revolution in the general system of European Governments, must shut his eyes to the evidence of things. On one hand, the public misery; on the other, the progress of reason and political information press forward an event for which the minds of men are ready and prepared. The late glorious revolution in France holds forth an example which sooner or later will be imitated by every nation in Europe. The struggles for independence in various parts of the globe, the emancipation of America, the fall of the *bastille*, are sure indications, that the human soul awakes from a long lethargy of herself to a proper sense of innate dignity and worth. Encreased by the streams of philosophy, the public sentiments swell above the narrow bounds which Aristocracy and Priestcraft had prescribed to their course.—Woe be to the Minister, and confusion to the Government, that shall dare

to oppose the torrent, or withstand the irresistible force of public opinion in its rapid progress to the grand principle of **UNIVERSAL REASON**, from which, as from the main ocean of the moral world, should be derived the fertilising streams of law, of religion, of civil policy.

In the accomplishment of the **NEW ORDER** of things, so devoutly to be wished for, there are two sorts of men against whom it becomes us to stand upon our guard. The first are the sons of violence, who would advise us to act with precipitation and harshness; the second are the timid race of men (and who, therefore, assume to themselves the appellation of moderate), who would blunt by the indecision of their character the vigour of our resolves. The later gentlemen will tell you, that things are not sufficiently mature, that the time is not yet come—that the English Constitution is not yet so far gone in corruption, as to require a remedy so violent. They confess, that the people are oppressed with taxes, that the freedom of the press is annihilated; that the tyranny of excise has made an alarming progress; but still they will tell you, there is great reason to hope that things will alter for the better, and that if Ministers should continue to aggravate the public grievances, the general misery will at last produce that remedy which it would be dangerous to provoke.—Such is the language of timidity, and not unfrequently the cant of pretended moderation in men,

who derive from the depression and distress of their fellow-men their anti-social privileges and selfish enjoyments. But what would we think of a person who should say to another, it is true you have been ill used. Your powerful neighbour has broken down your fences, robbed your orchard, corrupted your servants, removed the boundary of your estate,—but yet bear your wrongs with patience; your meek submission will perhaps disarm his injustice, and at all events it will be time enough to offer resistance when he tweaks you by the nose, kicks you in the breech, and spits in your face. But do not those gentlemen foresee, that the pusillanimous moderation which they prescribe is most likely to produce the very mischiefs which they dread: and ought they not to remember, that a people once vilified have not only rights to vindicate, but affronts to revenge! Let it be our task to prevent, by a timely reformation, that disgrace which torrents of blood might flow in vain to wash away.

The pressing necessity of such a reformation is on all hands acknowledged. The voice of public misery has been heard where it seldom has been able to penetrate, in the very midst of the Senate. Several Noble Lords, several Members of the House of Commons, have deigned to deplore the general distress. Lord Landstown, in particular, has exhibited the following picture, terrifying as it is true, of the universal wretchedness.

“ But

“ But what, in the mean time, as had been remarked by a Noble Lord, was becoming of that respectable and valuable class of the community, those gentlemen of small fortunes in the country, who discharged the functions of magistracy and police. By the latest accounts it appeared, that they were almost driven from the exercise of hospitality, and were emigrating into town, in order to educate their children, and board as cheaply as possible. Every day it appeared that some house was breaking up. The ancient order of yeomanry, between the farmers and country-gentlemen, was now *completely extinguished*. There was still a body of rich farmers, but these depended entirely on the extent of their capital. The peasantry, it appeared from the report of physicians, in consequence of their reduced living, were falling the victims of putrid distempers”*.

Here, then, we perceive, that not only the multitude,—for the sufferings of the *swinish multitude*, as the philanthropic Edmund Burke has dared to stigmatize the people, ought not perhaps to fix our attention for a moment,—we perceive, I say, that not only the multitude are plunged in the most lamentable distress, but also that the deluge of public misery has reached even to those whose more elevated situation had preserved them till now above the level of the general calamity. The gentlemen of small fortunes are forced

* Morning Chronicle, 10th May.

to fly from their paternal estates, where they can no longer exercise their wonted hospitality; they are forced to fly from the beloved haunts of their youth, and to hide their shame in some obscure corner of the capital. As for the yeomanry, they have vanished from the earth, the ancient glory of England is *completely extinguished*! "For shame hath devoured the labour of our fathers from our youth; their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters. We lie down in our shame, and our confusion covereth us *."

But why should the poor peasant droop with want in the midst of his labours? Why in the midst of plenty should dire famine† seize upon the tiller of the soil? We can dispense with his labours, say the rich; we have found out curious contrivances to perform the offices of husbandry without his aid. Are the poor then doomed to perish from the face of the earth? Shall the field support no living thing except the victims of your gluttony‡? Shall our cities swarm only with the ministers of your lusts? The land is ours, you reply; we bought it with our money, and we will do with it as we think fit. But when our fathers sold you

* Jeremiah.

† "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn."—Deut. chap. xxiv. ver. 4.

‡ This is literally the case in the north of Scotland, where large tracts of land that formerly supported a hardy and happy race of men, are now converted to grazing ground for cattle.

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this land for a piece of silver, did they sell also the rights of their children for ever? Did they forestall our claims? Did they bind in chains of brass the fate of a people whom, as yet, the earth had not seen, and who were destined to shoot forth into life long after the fathers of the forest had returned into dust? But did our fires make no proviso for their posterity? Does the deed by which they gave away their estate contain no salutary clause in our behalf? Is there no day of restoration appointed, no glad day of jubilee declared *? Have our

* All legislators who have any claim to the wisdom of that character, have taken care to establish checks against the most grinding of all usurpations, the monopoly of land. The regulations of Moses on that head, are worthy that SUPREME WISDOM to which his laws are referred.

“ Ye shall not oppress one another; but thou shalt fear thy God: for I am the Lord your God.

“ The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is mine: for ye are *strangers* and *sojourners* with me.

“ And in all the land of your possession ye shall grant a redemption for the land.

“ If thy brother be waxen poor, and hath sold away some of his possessions, and if any of his kin come to redeem it, then shall he redeem that which his brother sold.

“ And if the man shall have none to redeem it, and he himself be able to redeem it,

“ Then let him count the years of the sale thereof, and restore the overplus unto the man to whom he sold, that he may return unto his possession.

“ But if he be not able to restore it to him, then that which is sold shall remain in the hand of him that has bought it until the year of jubilee: and in the jubilee it shall go out, and he shall return into his possession.”—Levit. chap. xxv.

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forefathers devoured our inheritance? Robbers of posterity! have they dared to appear at the tribunal of the common Father of us all, with the spoil of their children in their hands? Have they carried with them our appointed portion of enjoyment? Have they sunk depressed into the earth with the anticipated curses of generations unborn; with all the weight of our wretchedness on their heads?—O that we had therefore remained still in the chaos of non-existence!—O that nature had repressed us in the threshold of life!—O that she had whispered in our ear, “there is no room for you on the earth, a privileged race of men have engrossed to themselves all the comforts of existence, and for you nothing remains but the tares of disappointment and the thorns of despair!”—And yet tell us, ye Lords of the earth, tell us, since we have no right to the land of our nativity, no claim to the ground on which we tread, tell us why our limbs are as vigorous and as comely as yours: tell us why our souls can boast an equal portion of heavenly fire: tell us, in fine, why our faculties and our desires forever falsify your titles, and give the lie to your parchments?

But the multitude, say they, the *swinish multitude*, say the powerful, have no knowledge; they are without wisdom; we have plunged them in the mire; they will wallow in the filth of their ignorance forever. It is true you have corrupted the understanding of the people; you have interposed between them
and

and the prospect of their rights, the dark clouds of accumulated prejudices: You have shaved the head of Samson; you have put out his eyes, it is true, but why should you drive him to despair by the keen edge of your mockery? are you not afraid, lest, when he hears the mad tumult of your merriment and reflects on the misery of his lot; when his sufferings thus aggravated by wanton insult, he compares with the felicities of your condition, are you not afraid, I say, lest, in the blindness of his rage, he should lay hold on the boasted *Corinthian Pillars** of your state, and by a desperate effort over-whelm in one dreadful ruin, himself, his oppressors, and all this lofty fabric of your pride?

To prevent so terrible an event (which the infatuated tyranny of government tends so evidently to produce) it becomes every man to contribute to the utmost of his power to open the eyes of the people, and to lead them to a firm, calm, and manly vindication of their rights. In order to avert every species of violence, (so contrary to those principles of freedom which seek to establish a system of government mild as that nature which is the basis of all our rights) it would be prudent in us to take a lesson from the operation of the late revolution in France. In that country, while *force* was on one side, and the *public will* on

* Nobility is a graceful ornament to the civil order. It is the Corinthian capital of polished society.—
Burke's Reflections, &c. p. 205.

the other, several acts of violence were committed from the unavoidable opposition of particular interests to the public good. But no sooner had the nation taken arms (and no nation unarmed ever vindicated their liberty, or long retained it in their hands); no sooner, I say, had the nation taken arms, and that public force was coupled with public opinion, when instantly all outrage ceased (for all resistance was in vain), and like the thunder of Omnipotence, the VOICE OF THE PEOPLE was heard with reverence from one extremity of France to the other.

To conclude, all that we desire is a fair and equal representation. Thence in the natural course of things will flow every blessing of good government. A free and liberal discussion of the principles of legislation in a National Assembly will produce in a few months and that too without violence, a redress of those grievances which ages of ignorance and misrule have heaped upon our head. Let us always remember, however, that liberty is only another name for equality, and that no nation deserves the appellation of free in which the conditions of men are greatly unequal. In order to restore the people by degrees to that happy state of independence, the National Assembly of France have put in activity several means which we also might adopt with success. Of these one of the most important is the abolition of the absurd right of primogeniture or eldership. But above
all

all let us ever keep in view this eternal truth, that liberty can never endure which is not firmly infixed in the soil, and that in order to brave the tempest of years and to flourish through a long period of ages, the plant of freedom must strike deep and spread wide her roots in the bowels of the earth*!

* If it be indeed possible to accomplish any great improvement in the state of human affairs, and to unite the essential quality of a rude state with the order, refinements, and accommodations of cultivated ages; such improvement is not so likely to be brought about by any means, as by a just and enlightened policy respecting property in land. It is a subject intimately connected with the proper occupation and the comfortable subsistence of men, that is with their virtue and their happiness. It is of a real and substantial nature on which the regulations of law may be made to operate with efficacy and even with precision.

“ So powerful and salutary might the good effects of such an enlightened policy prove, so beneficial, such a restoration of the claims of nature and the general birthrights of mankind, that it might alone suffice to renovate the strength of nations, exhausted by civil war, or by great and unsuccessful enterprizes; and even in the most flourishing states it might give rise to a new æra of prosperity, surpassing all example and all expectation that may reasonably be founded on any other means of improvement.”—*An Essay on the Right of Property in Land, with Respect to its Foundation in the Law of Nature, its present Establishment by the Municipal Laws of Europe, and the Regulations by which it might be rendered more beneficial to the lower Ranks of Mankind.* p. 53.

The above Essay is by far the most profound work that has ever appeared on that important subject. The author is said to be a Dr. Ogilby, Professor of Humanity at the college of Aberdeen.

In the formation of the future National Assembly of this country, it becomes us to avoid that dangerous deviation from sound policy in which the French nation have erred in assigning to their deputies not only the province of discussing public affairs and proposing laws, but also the power of enacting them. The suspensive *veto* of the King is not a remedy, but an aggravation of the mischief. Let us together with the advantages of a fair representation vindicate to ourselves that actual exercise of the sovereignty, by which the antient republics of Greece (notwithstanding the great defects of their government from their ignorance of representation) exalted the human character higher than it has risen since their fall. To the *wisdom of the nation* condensed in the National Assembly, it belongs to deliberate, to discuss, and to propose decrees, but nothing less than the *will of the people* can carry those decrees into LAW. The difficulty of assembling the people is at best an absurd objection : for the people can as easily assemble by sections, districts, &c. to give their *sanction* or their *veto* to a decree proposed by the National Assembly, as they can to appoint that Assembly itself. It is as easy for the people (and certainly much more important) to affirm or reject a decree, as it is to elect a judge, a deputy, a bishop.

With respect to the system of government to be adopted, it appears to me that the best, and indeed the only good system of government,

vernment, is that which unites in one, a pure democracy, a pure aristocracy, and a pure monarchy. To explain this seeming enigma, in the first place, the government must consist in a pure democracy, inasmuch as the power of the *whole* must be omnipotent over all its *parts*; for when a *part* has power to controul the *whole*; tyranny, and not government, must ensue. In the second place, a pure aristocracy must prevail (that is to say, an aristocracy in the proper and primitive sense of the word, which signifies *pre-eminence of the best*); for if the best and wisest were not at the helm of the State, the government would incur every moment the danger of shipwreck. But who are the *best*? Those certainly who are *chosen* by the people; for who except a man's fellow-citizens, can be or ought to be the judges of his *probity* and *wisdom*? A good government, therefore, will consist in an aristocracy chosen by the people. In the third place, a pure monarchy is necessary to good government; or in other words, it is necessary that *one will* should reign supreme over all; for if there existed in the state more than *one will*, contention would ensue, and contention is the enemy of government, for *government is concord*. In a good government, therefore, there can be but *one will* or monarchy, which is *the will of the people*; for if the will of a *part* could controul the will of the *whole*, the *natural ratio* of things would be inverted, and tyranny would overthrow

overthrow government. This, in my opinion, is the POLITICAL TRINITY, three modifications of one essence (the people), in which the whole science of government is summed up.

Let us now try, by these *criteria* of good government, the Constitution of Great Britain. In the first place, we have no democracy; for the people, as we have already seen, are not represented. In the second place, we have no aristocracy or *pre-eminence of the best*; for the governors of the nation are *the children of chance*, and not *the choice of the people*. In the third place, the British Constitution is not monarchical; for the government is committed, not to the *guidance of one will*, but to the *contention of several*. In its best theory, it is the warfare of three wills, but in substance and fact, IT IS THE CONJURATED TREASON OF THREE PARTS AGAINST THE WILL OF THE WHOLE.

Since, therefore, it is clearly demonstrated, that the Constitution, as it is called, of Great Britain is neither monarchy, aristocracy, nor democracy;—What is it then? It is OLIGARCHY, OCHLARCHY, TYRANNY, CORRUPTION, ANARCHY.

To this Constitution, therefore, what hinders us from saying in the words of the *inspired* writer, “THOU ART WEIGHED IN THE BALANCE, AND ART FOUND WANTING?”

THE END.

